



Observations from the Field of Faith-Based Organizing: Revitalizing Social Work Skills in Policy and Social Action

Journal:	Professional Development: The International Journal of Continuing Social Work Education
Article Title:	<i>Observations from the Field of Faith-Based Organizing: Revitalizing Social Work Skills in Policy and Social Action</i>
Author(s):	<i>Janice M. Staral</i>
Volume and Issue Number:	<i>Vol. 5 No. 2</i>
Manuscript ID:	<i>52004</i>
Page Number:	<i>4</i>
Year:	<i>2002</i>

Professional Development: The International Journal of Continuing Social Work Education is a refereed journal concerned with publishing scholarly and relevant articles on continuing education, professional development, and training in the field of social welfare. The aims of the journal are to advance the science of professional development and continuing social work education, to foster understanding among educators, practitioners, and researchers, and to promote discussion that represents a broad spectrum of interests in the field. The opinions expressed in this journal are solely those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the policy positions of The University of Texas at Austin's School of Social Work or its Center for Social Work Research.

Professional Development: The International Journal of Continuing Social Work Education is published three times a year (Spring, Summer, and Winter) by the Center for Social Work Research at 1 University Station, D3500 Austin, TX 78712. Journal subscriptions are \$110. Our website at www.profdevjournal.org contains additional information regarding submission of publications and subscriptions.

Copyright © by The University of Texas at Austin's School of Social Work's Center for Social Work Research. All rights reserved. Printed in the U.S.A.

ISSN: 1097-4911

URL: www.profdevjournal.org

Email: www.profdevjournal.org/contact

Observations from the Field of Faith-Based Organizing: Revitalizing Social Work Skills in Policy and Social Action

Janice M. Staral; PhD, ACSW

Introduction

Social work educators, practitioners, and students are expected to become knowledgeable about current issues in social welfare policy and social change strategies (Council of Social Work Education, Section 6.2). This knowledge should be directed toward efforts that promote the well-being of clients and the larger community. This paper focuses on the institutional church's linkage with faith-based community organizing and related efforts to promote social action. The methods utilized by faith-based organizations, as well as their accomplishments, are discussed at length. This article will examine the ways in which faith-based organizing can help social workers: develop a deeper interest in social policy issues, learn new skills for social action, and consider involvement in faith-based organizing to affect positive social change.

The author has participated in various faith-based organizing activities and believes that the insight gained through these experiences will be beneficial to social work practitioners. Faith-based organizing provides another model to inform the profession about policy issues and social action. While social work texts also offer valuable conceptual information in this area, involvement in faith-based organizing provides a more inclusive perspective. Working within faith-based organizations not only increases one's knowledge of specific policy issues, it gives one the opportunity to immerse his/herself in those issues and become an active member of social change. To adopt the terminology of Saul Alinsky, this experiential component "put(s) the fire in our bellies," as we learn through various trials to sharpen our skills and better comprehend critical concepts.

Mandate for Social Action

Social work's presence in social change, policy issues, and the political arena has been uneven. Specht and Courtney (1994) challenge the social work profession to determine what role social workers should play in addressing society's current social ills. In the preface to their book *Unfaithful angels: How social work has abandoned its mission*, this challenge is summarized:

When I first came to know social workers half a century ago, they had a mission that was, to me, appealing and significant: to help poor people, to improve community life, and to solve difficult social problems. But times have changed. Today, a significant number of social workers are practicing psychotherapy and doing so privately with a primarily middle-class professional Caucasian clientele... a large portion of the profession is adrift in the psychotherapeutic seas. (pp. ix-x)

This book was received with much controversy, causing some heated debates and creating some tension between social work clinicians and social workers practicing in macro areas. Although Specht and Courtney's book may have raised some controversy and division within the profession, the National Association of Social Work Code of Ethics, adopted in 1996, clarifies that involvement in social policy and change is not an option. It is a mandate. The NASW Code states:

Social workers should engage in social and political action... Social should be aware of the impact of the political arena on practice and should advocate for changes in policy and legislation to improve social conditions in order to meet basic human needs and promote social justice (section 6.04).

Janice M. Staral PhD, ACSW, is the Director of the Social Work Program and Assistant Professor in the Department of Social & Cultural Sciences at Marquette University in Milwaukee, WI. She serves as a Board member on Milwaukee Inner City Churches Allied for Hope (MICAH), a faith-based organization.

Correspondence should be addressed to: Janice M. Staral, Marquette University, Department of Social & Cultural Sciences, Social Work Program, Lalumiere Hall, P.O. Box 1881, Milwaukee, WI 53201-1881

E-mail: janice.staral@marquette.edu; Telephone: (414) 288-3441; Fax: (414) 288-6444

While the profession's mandate to promote social equity is clear, social workers have not been directed to pursue a particular change method. Faith-based organizing is a valuable means for personal involvement in positive social change and justice, and can be a viable method of teaching social work students about social policy and activism.

Learning about faith-based organizations is congruent with the overall direction that social work education and practice is taking in terms of integrating knowledge about religion and spirituality into the social work curriculum. Authors such as Canda, 1989, 1997; Dudley & Helfgott, 1990; Amato-von Hemert, 1994; Anderson & Worthen, 1997; and Russel, 1998, have written about the importance of integrating religious and spiritual content into the social work curriculum. Other articles in the literature maintain that religion and spirituality is a relevant area of social work practice (Holland, 1989; Sheridan, Wilmer & Archeson, 1994; Bullis, 1996; Canda, 1999). Canda, Naskashima, Burgess, and Russel (1999) published a bibliography that includes over 500 references to social work's relationship to spirituality.

Saul Alinsky and Faith-Based Organizing

Faith-based organizing and the role of the faith-based community in promoting justice is well documented. This type of organizing has historically been prominent in many Third World countries, and currently remains a principal method of organizing (Lithicum, 1991). The historic Black Church is another example of using religion-based strategies to fight social injustice. Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Cone, 1991; and Haight, 1998, recount this social action from the time of slavery, through the Civil Rights movement, and continuing to the present. Cnaan (1999) devotes one chapter in his book to explaining how organized religion has supported the empowerment of various disenfranchised groups. Likewise, Hanna & Robinson (1994) describe various transformative social change strategies that have been employed by religious groups.

In this article, the focus of faith-based organizing is specifically directed toward and rooted in the organizing concepts developed in the late 1940s by sociologist Saul Alinsky. He gleaned these concepts from his earlier work in the "Back of Yards neighborhoods of Chicago." From his experiences in Chicago, Alinsky founded the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), a training organization for community organizing. Rubin & Rubin (1992) describe Alinsky's style of organizing as "influenced both by the sociological perspective that social problems have a community basis and the militant labor organizing tactics of John Lewis" (p. 21). Although the Alinsky style of organizing is known for its dramatic public protests, the goal of his work was to help the disenfranchised gain some measure of power to effect change, a goal consistent with the profession's mission.

The key objective of Alinsky's style of organizing is to train ordinary citizens to be competent and confident in negotiating with bureaucrats, political, and business people within their community. The training model includes utilizing the power of relationships, coalitions, reciprocity, and respect. The Iron Rule of this philosophy is "never do for others what they can do for themselves" (Cortez, 1993, p. 300).

Alinsky involved churches in his organizing efforts, but held them as somewhat suspect and believed it was an institution that could not be reformed. Hanna & Robinson (1994) describe Alinsky's principles as having "an insistence on being absolutely nonideological, with a focus on political pragmatism, fluidity, and compromise ... including dismissing principles as irrelevant to politics" (p. 191). In the mid-1970s, after Alinsky's death, the Industrial Areas Foundation began to consider methods to create more permanent structures that would not dissolve, like they had in the past, after a specific organizing campaign was achieved. This shift involved directing efforts toward churches and a values-based model, a departure from Alinsky's original conception of organizing. Hanna & Robinson (1994) make this

distinction of a values-based organizing methodology clear by explaining this new orientation.

A key component of the value base for institution-based community organizing is the Judaeo-Christian ethic of compassion for others, responsibility to the community, a sense of morality and fair play, and a striving for social justice. Open identification with this tradition is a naturally comfortable association for the organizing projects rooted in religious congregations. Quotes from the Old and New Testaments are frequent and large meetings are typically opened in prayer. (p.86)

More recently, Alinsky's classical community organizing techniques have been adopted by faith-based organizations both internationally and within the United States. Linthicum (1991), an urban Presbyterian pastor, community organizer and trainer, writes about his work with World Vision International. This group works with what Linthicum refers to as the "impoverished two-thirds world," in which "ordinary Christians already present in a city to develop their skills in enabling the poor to deal directly with their own problems" (p. 2).

In the United States, faith-based organizing or congregation-based organizing are terms that refer to the same concept. Jacobsen (2001) describes these types of organizing as follows:

Congregation-based community organizing joins the values and principles of Dr. King to the methodology of Saul Alinsky. Here we have a creative, often uneasy tension between faithfulness and effectiveness, morality and expediency, conscience and compromise, the prophetic and the practical, the world as it should be and the world as it is. There are some who cannot handle this tension. It seems to be an unholy alliance (p. 24).

Milwaukee Inner City Churches Allied for Hope (MICAH): History and Structure

The author's introduction to faith-based organizing was accidental. It occurred while doing

research in the early 1990s at the Reformation Lutheran Church, a racially mixed central city church located in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The church is located in one of the poorer census tracts of Milwaukee, with a neighborhood composition of primarily African American residents. Church membership lists 365 baptized members and is comprised of almost an equal number of neighborhood residents and white suburbanites. The church was established in 1908 and until the late 1950s, had over 2000 members, and was comprised of middle to upper-income white members who lived in the neighborhood (Staral, 1998, 2000).

Reformation Church was selected for past research because it provided an opportunity to study the methods the church leadership used to combat the social ills in the community and offered neighborhood people integration into the church's community change efforts. During this time, the author learned that Reformation Church was one of the original founding members of the faith-based group called Milwaukee Inner City Churches Allied for Hope (MICAH).

MICAH is a multi-ethnic, interfaith organization established in 1988, and is an affiliate of the Gamaliel Foundation, an organization that provides faith-based organizing training. The following provides information about MICAH's evolution, and was extracted from internal MICAH documents that relay much of the group's history.

MICAH was founded as an ecumenical church-based organization that was developed as a response to the dire conditions that existed in Milwaukee's central city. Both the Hunger Task Force of Milwaukee and the Catholic Church's Campaign for Human Development were considering the possibility of establishing a church-based organization that would deal with the city's social issues. The two social service organizations decided to join forces and form one organization, resulting in the establishment of MICAH.

MICAH began with eight charter members, all central city churches. Internal documents report

that the organization's goal was to provide a "vehicle for inner-city congregations to address social justice issues in the city, state, and nation." The statement continued with the pledge to "work on behalf of all 200,000 residents of the central city in a number of areas: housing, economic development, drugs, crimes and education." MICAH's motto is "To do what is just." MICAH's guiding scriptural message is drawn from the Book of Micah, chapter six, verse eight. "This is what the Lord asks of you: only this, to act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with your God."

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, the membership of MICAH was limited to central city churches, with a focus on specific problems identified within the city limits. As this faith-based group began to mature as an organization, the original members recognized that some of their identified problems extended beyond the central city, and that inclusion of other churches could increase their power base. As a result of this decision to include non-central city churches, the organization's membership in 2001 included both city and suburban churches, increasing its membership to 43 congregations. Although membership continues to expand, the organization retains its original name both as a reminder of its history and to insure that as other concerns are addressed, the needs of the central city are never overlooked.

MICAH's organizational structure is composed of a Board of Directors and Executive Committee. These two groups are comprised of a diverse volunteer group of men and women drawn from both the central city and the suburbs, including low-income individuals, professionals, and religious leaders. Each congregation has one board member who serves a two-year term. Internal staff is limited to a lead organizer, an additional community organizer, and a secretary. Consequently, much of the work carried out by this activist group is the result of committed clergy and dedicated volunteers.

In 1998, more than 125 clergy from the region met to begin to craft a vision of a larger, umbrella

organization that would work together on issues that affect the wider geographic area of southeastern Wisconsin. This larger group is comprised of MICAH and three other area faith-based groups; two of the groups are from the nearby cities of Racine and Kenosha, and one is from southern Milwaukee County (Annual Banquet Booklet, 1999).

Examples of other Faith-Based Organizations

The organizing style and principles of MICAH do not differ in any significant way from more prominent groups like Communities Organized for Public Service (COPS). Ernesto Cortez founded this organization in San Antonio, Texas, in 1974, and it has been very successful in developing coalitions both inside and outside of the religious sector. These coalitions include the business community, San Antonio city government, the local Private Industry Council, the governor of Texas, and various other state and local agencies, all brought together to create a \$7 million, high-skill job training effort (Cortez, 1993). Because of its multiple successes, COPS has become a model for organizing around the country. Another group is the Baltimoreans United in Leadership (BUILD). Cooper (1997), reports that this group was successful in establishing a living wage ordinance for city workers in Baltimore. McDougall (1993) provides further discussion on the developmental history and goals of this Baltimore group.

Most faith-based groups receive organizing training from an umbrella organization dedicated to that purpose. The Gamaliel Foundation, located in Chicago, Illinois, provides training services to any MICAH member. The Gamaliel Foundation was formed in 1986. The Gamaliel network includes forty-five organizations in fifteen states, and three organizations in South Africa (Jacobsen, 2001). The author's experience with the Gamaliel Foundation will be discussed further in this paper. Further information regarding other faith-based groups can be obtained from Shelterforce Online (2001). This group maintains a Faith-Based

Directory and has a complete on-line listing of various training centers. Additionally, Hanna & Robinson (1994) offer critiques of many faith-based training groups.

Experiential Learning through MICAH

As an educator, the author finds it important to combine experiential learning opportunities with theoretical concepts of policy and social action. In 1995, the author began attending some of the "actions" (a planned intervention to bring additional attention to a designated social issue) initiated by MICAH. Later in 2001, the author accepted the offer to become a MICAH board member. Again, the author discovered that involvement not only provided an opportunity to become engaged in social change, but it also enhanced the ability to teach social policy, and resulted in many significant experiences.

One of the author's more memorable experiences was with a MICAH campaign that took place in 1996. It began when the County Executive of Milwaukee supported cutting \$3.8 million from the county's funding for alcohol and other drug abuse (AODA) treatment programs. The money that was to be cut provided AODA treatment for county residents who had no insurance or financial means to obtain such treatment. The campaign's mission was to restore the original \$3.8 million to finance this treatment. As the budget was being discussed, the group had various meetings with county supervisors and the county executive, but the members failed to restore the funding.

Consequently, MICAH organizers decided to take "action" directed toward the county executive. After over two hours of outdoor protest, a group of about 30 to 40 MICAH members (including the author) entered the courthouse and remained in the county executive's conference room, demanding a meeting with the county executive himself. The county executive met with the protesters, but refused to change his position. The MICAH leaders then asked their supporters to leave the courthouse

peaceably, but a small group of 10 to 15 people, including mostly ministers, decided to remain in the courthouse overnight in the form of a "pray-in protest." The "pray-in" ended at ten o'clock the next morning, but not before an emergency meeting was held with the county supervisors with a promise to restore funding for treatment. The "pray-in" also captured media attention and public sentiment throughout the 24-hour period of protest. Of the \$3.8 million, \$2.8 million was restored.

MICAH's Annual Public Meetings are another example of how faith-based organizing can enhance the connection between public policy and activism. The Public Meetings include celebrations of any victories in terms of policy changes, reports of defeats and challenges, introduction of the new officers, and setting the agenda for the next year. At the 2001 Public Meeting, over 1,000 people attended the one-and-a-half-hour meeting. It was one of the few times in Milwaukee, identified as one of the most racially segregated cities in the United States (Massey & Denton, 1993), where people of different socio-economic class, race, ethnicity, religion, and age come together. This event has become so prominent that many local and state political leaders are also in attendance.

Integrating Faith-Based Organizing with Continuing Education

Concepts from faith-based organizing can be integrated into traditional social work curricula as well as continuing education curricula. Educators can draw from community organizing textbooks, such as Kahn (1994), Rivera & Erlich (1998), or Rubin & Rubin (2001). They can also utilize information from the following groups, including the Association of Community Organization and Social Administration (ACOSA), Social Welfare Action Alliance (formerly the Bertha Capen Reynolds Society), and Influencing State Policy. Texts that relate specifically to faith-based organizing include Linthicum's (1991) account from a Third World perspective, Hanna & Robinson (1994), and

Jacobsen (2001), who writes directly from his training at the Gamaliel Foundation and describes how this training is applied to MICAH. In every case, the introduction of these concepts should include mention of Saul Alinsky's work and legacy.

In utilizing a faith-based organizing context, the educator can choose various organizing principles or concepts and divide them into sections. For example, sections could include conducting one-on-ones, doing an agitation, cutting an issue, determining an action, writing a mission statement, or planning a public meeting. These are all concepts that students can learn in the classroom or through workshops, but if they have access to a faith-based group experience, the power and utility of these concepts will be greatly enhanced. If these groups are not available, educators can bring in video clips, flyers, or documents used by faith-based groups. These documents can provide examples of how one might write policy or mission statements, or how to use publicity to capture the attention of the general public. Participants will also learn that, although these principles are being applied from a faith-based perspective, these skills are just as applicable to a secular setting.

One key principle utilized by MICAH, or any similar faith-based organization, is the establishment of a relationship (a main concept discussed in social work) and, within this relationship, learning the person's self-interest. This strategy is accomplished by conducting "one-on-ones":

On one level a one-on-one is as natural as a conversation over a backyard fence...On another level it is skilled, intentional, and focused. The one-on-one interview is a means of initiating or building a relationship. The primary (and usually only) agenda of a one-on-one is to get to know the person...It is simply a conversation in which we learn another person's self-interest. ...we come to understand what is important to another person, what motivates him or her, what is his or her passion (Jacobsen, 2001, p. 59).

By practicing one-on-ones with each other, students could improve their interviewing skills, while discovering that these skills that are typically understood from a "clinical or micro-level" can also be applied to a macro level. If students did one-on-ones in the classroom, it could improve class cohesion as well as encourage students to develop deeper insight into their classmates' interests. This concept of one-on-ones could be further enhanced with a faith-based organizing connection. In this case, students could assist an organizer and volunteer to conduct one-on-ones at a local congregation or synagogue. This process would provide useful information to the organizer as well. Students would improve their interviewing skills and have an opportunity to conduct interviews in diverse neighborhoods with people from various religious denominations.

Another concept that Jacobsen discusses is helping people to identify and act on their "self-interest." For social workers, given the multiple demands that they must negotiate, clarifying their self-interest could be of great value. Social workers might be afraid to act on their self-interest (or within social work ethics) because of peer pressure or concerns of being discredited or disliked. This style of organizing includes using confrontation that is referred to as agitation and could be very useful to social workers and practitioners. Jacobsen (2001) describes the concept of agitation as follows:

Agitation is a skill. It is a means of getting others to act out of their own power and self-interest, out of their own vision for their life. It is not getting someone to do what someone else wants the person to do...Relationship is a prerequisite of agitation. I have no right to people I do not know...An agitator is trying to create community, build an organization, raise up leaders...Most churches do not operate on the basis of healthy agitation that is rooted in relationship and that summons forth the best from their people (p. 66).

"Action" is another important concept utilized

by MICAHA. Earlier in this paper, the author described the profound experience that students and organizers experienced during the protest to reverse AODA treatment cuts. If students are connected to a faith-based group, they can be invited to these actions, or at least given video or written media accounts of these events. Students not connected to a faith-based group can be encouraged to explore their self-interest and determine if taking up an action would bring attention to their concern.

Many of the concepts from faith-based organizing can be replicated in the classroom, with the exception of the MICAHA Public Meeting. Fortunately, the Public Meeting was only a five-minute bus ride from the author's campus, so students were encouraged to attend this meeting and given additional credit for critiquing the meeting. Students who attended this meeting commented that they had learned so much more about policy issues and that they had grown to understand that some of these issues even affected their surrounding campus area.

Applying Faith-Based Organizing Concepts to Identified Social Issues

The principles utilized by the MICAHA organization are not unique to faith-based groups alone, and can be applied within a variety of practice settings across a broad range of social issues. The members of MICAHA establish priorities and utilize specific issue committees to set goals and strategize needed actions. The current standing committees are Labor, Jobs and Economic Development, Education, Alcohol and other Drug Treatment, and Immigration. Many of the MICAHA initiatives have been successful, and Jacobsen (2001) lists over two pages of these achievements, ranging from the passage of a city ordinance, to mandating the rehabilitation of at least 50 abandoned houses annually for low-income residents, to reducing class size in some of Milwaukee Public Schools (pp. 28-30).

The AODA action that was presented earlier in this paper provides one example of how an issue of

concern was utilized in order to restore the funding cuts for alcohol and drug treatment. Another example involves MICAHA's efforts to confront the large amount of houses being sold to absentee landlords by the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority. After ongoing discussions were unable to resolve this concern, the leaders of the organization, along with 100 of its members, sponsored an action that included holding a press conference at a nearby church and leading a walk to a run-down house in the neighborhood. As a result of this action and further discussion, the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority developed and implemented new policies that were in accord with what the group had demanded (MICAHA Banquet Program, 1999).

Additionally, one of the current issues provides a model for understanding the necessary process by researching and writing policy, gaining legislative support and promoting activism in order to have the policy transformed into law. In 2002, MICAHA began a campaign focusing on changing what happens to nonviolent drug offenders. The Mission Statement is very clear:

To secure outcome-effective alcohol and other drug addiction treatment for low-income and uninsured people. To treat addiction as a public health issue, not a reason to incarcerate thousands of non-violent low-income and minority people (Annual Public Meeting, November 15, 2001).

The process required to effect the above mission statement involves changing the state criminal code. MICAHA has identified this as an issue of justice, given their belief that those with higher incomes and health insurance who are arrested as drug offenders are able to obtain treatment, whereas lower income people cannot afford treatment, and because of their circumstances, do not change, and consequently end up in jail. In this campaign, the group will draw upon a recent law (Proposition 36) passed in the state of California where the law provides for treatment rather than incarceration.

The rallying call for this campaign will be "Treatment Instead of Prison."

The above case provides examples of the various social issues in which the strategies from faith-based organizing can be applied. Continuing education classes can use these examples or define their own issues in their surrounding community and use them as a basis to practice the concepts of one-on-ones, agitation, cutting an issue, doing actions, writing a mission statement, or planning a public meeting. Drawing on the similarities between the values of faith-based organizing and the social work profession can easily facilitate discussions regarding faith-based organizing. This includes the importance of developing relationships, an emphasis on self-determination and empowerment (The Iron Rule: "Never do for others what they can do for themselves"), and the mandate to work for and toward justice.

Opportunities & Limitations in Faith-Based Organizing

The tactics of MICAHA are sometimes considered controversial. An article from *The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, November 25, 2001, describes MICAHA as an "in-your-face brand of non-violent confrontation on issues from open housing to school reform." Social workers who learn the techniques of faith-based organizing will also need to know when this confrontational style of organizing is not an appropriate method, and may be counter-productive in cases where future cooperation or alliances may be needed.

Involvement in MICAHA does not necessitate membership in a church, but church affiliation is the typical method of involvement. If a person's church is involved in a faith-based organization, the person can easily be linked, but this is not the only way to become involved. If a person wants to find an activist church, they could contact the headquarters of a specific religious denomination and inquire about the presence and location of an activist church or faith-based organization. The Catholic Campaign for Human Development, an

organization that provides funding to various faith-based organizations, is another point of contact. It is the social justice arm of the U.S. Conference of Bishops, and distributes funds to organizing groups for social change (Axel-Lute, 2001).

Being involved in a church group might afford more flexibility than one might expect. The author became a board member of MICAHA before becoming an official member of the church being represented. Individuals who embrace a group's activist goals and have a respect for a faith-based approach, but do not want to be connected to a specific church, could choose to volunteer directly out of the MICAHA office. MICAHA is open to the participation of non-Christian groups, but many MICAHA events continue to reflect a Judeo-Christian perspective. Social workers and educators who have had negative church-related experiences, or who maintain some suspicion toward institutional religion, may be reluctant to participate in this type of organizing. For example, practitioners and students may question whether the needs of the church hierarchy were being met rather than the needs of the community. According to Hanna & Robinson (1994), "Alinsky himself was suspicious towards all institutions of authority, but specifically believed that you could not reform the church, which he felt was an unwinnable fight" (p. 211). However, the above authors report that The Gamaliel Foundation has a different viewpoint, and explains this difference in the following way. "The Gamaliel Foundation talks more strongly of a goal of reforming churches—trying to get them to consciously and truly live out their credos—to make the word flesh and fashion a new theology from the experience of organizing" (p. 193).

A final concern in regard to organizing, as well as social work, is that of gaining a consensus in regard to justice issues. Reichert (2001) refers to the related term of social justice at length, contending that there is no clear definition of the term and that competing interests or philosophies affect what gets defined as social justice. This concern is

instructive for the person involved in faith-based organizing, encouraging them to be mindful of the need to maintain a critical perspective while involved in the organizing process. In terms of opportunities, exposure to faith-based organizing can help social workers experience hope and become re-energized in their professional work. For students, it makes the theoretical concepts both believable and accessible.

The use of faith-based organizing to educate social workers should not be seen as a departure from classical community organizing, but as a method to enhance teaching about overall organizing strategies. It can also be used as a means of integrating social work with religion from a macro perspective. Additionally, inclusion of this material provides a historical perspective on the role of the church as a place where low-income and marginalized people have gathered for support, and in some cases, collective action.

Inclusion of church-based organizing becomes even more important as the United States faces a decline in community cohesion and government devolution, where decision-making and the flow of money is being re-directed from the Federal Government to the state and local levels (Reisch, 2000). Indeed, with the weakening of the nation's social welfare safety net, the church is frequently the only remaining institution within the central city. Social workers who are knowledgeable about these methods can join with others and gain a voice to effect change. In fact, Slessarev (2000) claims that faith-based organizing is becoming the fastest growing form of organizing in the U.S.

Providing faith-based education can also help social workers to grow in cultural competence, since many faith-based groups are multi-ethnic and ecumenical. Students who read about Gutierrez' (1990) conceptualization of empowerment will be able to relate these concepts to the Iron Rule and, if connected to a group like MICAHA, will also have an experiential understanding of her work. In this case, education supports the social worker in learn-

ing about the most pressing local and state policy issues directly from community leaders, as well as from scholars.

Additionally, it has only been during the last ten years that more Schools of Social Work have begun to integrate issues from religion or spirituality into the social work curriculum (Russel, 1998). Learning about this integration is a new frontier for many social workers. The concepts gained from faith-based organizing is important to social workers who want to stay abreast of current issues, and offers another option to responding to new concerns.

Incorporating real-life experiences into the classroom setting requires additional effort on the part of the educator because it necessitates a level of participation or communication with the faith-based environment, but the passion associated with this type of organizing may well be worth the effort. In the author's case, serving as a board member expedited the process because the board usually knew in advance when various MICAHA activities would occur and could place these specific dates on the class syllabus. However, educators who develop relationships with faith-based group leaders could also keep abreast of the issues in other ways.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is clear that the work of faith-based organizations that borrow from the Alinsky style of organizing will be controversial, but the author contends that it offers another important perspective that should be included in social work education and practice. Church-based groups provide another avenue for social change. For some members in social work, these organizations might provide the stamina and inspiration to continue the important work toward justice, even after a long day in the office or the classroom. As in the words of Dom Helder Camara, a Brazilian Archbishop and champion of the poor, "If I dream alone, it is only a dream. If we dream together, it is the beginning of a reality" (Jacobsen, 2001, p. 27).

Observations from the Field of Faith-Based Organizing: Revitalizing Social Work Skills in Policy and Social Action

References

- Alinsky, S. (1971). *Rules for radicals*. New York, NY: Random House.
- Amato-von Hemert, K. (1994). Should social work education address religious issues? Yes! *Journal of Social Work Education*, 30(1), 7-12.
- Anderson, D. & Worthen, D. (1997). Exploring a fourth dimension: Spirituality as a resource for the couple therapist. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 23, 3-12.
- Association of Community Organization and Social Administration (ACOSA), Alice Johnson, Treasurer, 8567 Sugar Tree Dr., Novelty, Ohio 44072 USA. E-mail: akj3@po.cwru.edu
- Axel-Lute, M. (2001, January/February). We can't be pegged: Catholic Campaign for Human Development follows a path that is neither right nor left. *Shelter Force Online*, 1-5.
- Bullis, R. (1996). *Spirituality in social work practice*. Washington, D.C.: Taylor & Francis Publishing.
- Canda, E. (1989). Religious content in social work education: A comparative approach. *Journal of Social Work Education*, Winter, 1, 36-45.
- Canda, E. (1990). Afterword: Linking spirituality and social work education: Five themes for innovation. *Social Thought*, 8(2), 97-106
- Canda, E. & Furman, L. (1999). *Spiritual diversity in social work practice*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Canda, E., Nakashima, M., Burgess, V., & Russel, R. (1999). *Spiritual diversity and social work: A comprehensive bibliography with annotations*. Alexandria, VA: Council on Social Work Education.
- Cooper, M. (1997, June 2). When push comes to shove: Who is welfare really helping? *The Nation*, 1-15.
- Cortez, E. (1993). Reweaving the fabric: The iron rule and the IAF strategy for power and politics. in Henry Cisneros (Ed.), *Interwoven Destinies*, (pp. 295-319). New York, NY: W.W. Norton Co.
- Council on Social Work Education. (1994). *Handbook on accreditation standards and procedures, 4th ed.*, Alexandria, VA: CSWE, 89-90.
- Dudley, J. & Helfgott, C. (1990). Exploring a place for spirituality in the social work curriculum. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 26(3), 287-294.
- Gutierrez, L. (1990). Working with women of color: An empowerment perspective. *Social Work*, (35), 97-102.
- Haight, W. (1998). Gathering the spirit at First Baptist Church: Spirituality as a protective factor in the lives of African American children. *Social Work*, 43(3), 213-221.
- Hanna, M. & Robinson, B. (1994). *Strategies for community empowerment*. Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press.
- Holland, T. (1989). Values, faith and professional practice. *Social Thought*, 15(1), 28-40.
- Influencing State Policy & Legislation, Dr. Robert Schneider, VCU School of Social Work, P.O. Box 842027, Richmond, VA 23284-2027, from <http://www.statepolicy.org/>
- Jacobsen, D. (2001). *Doing justice: Congregation & community organizing*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.
- Kahn, S. (1994). *How people get power*. Washington D.C.: NASW Press.
- Lincoln, C., Mamiya, E., Lawrence H. (1990). *The black church in the African American experience*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Linthicum, R. (1991). *Empowering the poor*. Monrovia, CA: MARC-World Vision International.
- Maloof, R. (1997). *The new right and its challenge to the profession of social work*. University of Connecticut, West Hartford, CT: The Institute for the Advancement of Political Social Work.
- Massey, D. & Denton, N. (1993). *American apartheid: Segregation and the making of the underclass*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- McDougall, H. (1993). *Black Baltimoreans: A new theory of community*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Milwaukee Inner City Allied for Hope. (1999, May 22). *Annual banquet program*, 4011 W. Capitol Dr., Milwaukee, WI 53216.
- Milwaukee Inner City Allied for Hope (2001, Nov. 15). *Annual public meeting program*, 4011 W. Capitol Dr., Milwaukee, WI 53216.
- National Association of Social Workers (1996). *Code of Ethics*. Washington, D.C.: NASW.
- Reichert, E. (2001, Spring). Move from social justice to human rights provides new perspective. *Professional Development: The International Journal of Continuing Social Work Education*, 4(1), 5-11.
- Reisch, M. (2000). Social workers and politics in the new century. *Social Work*, 45(4), 293-297.
- Rivera, F. & Erlich, J. (1998). *Community organizing in a diverse society*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Rubin J. & Rubin, I. (1992). *Community organizing and development*. 2nd ed., Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon
- Rubin J. & Rubin, I. (2001). *Community organizing and development*. 3rd ed., Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Russel, R. (1998). Spirituality and religion in graduate social work education. In E. Canda (Ed.), *Spirituality in Social Work: New Directions*. New York, NY: Haworth Press, 47-66.
- Shelterforce Online. (2001). *Faith based directory*. Retrieved November 30, 2001, from <http://www.nhi.org>
- Sheridan, M, Wilmer, C. & Atcheson, L. (1994). Inclusion of content on religion and spirituality in the social work curriculum. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 30(3), 363-376.
- Sherwood, David. (1998). Charitable Choice: Opportunity and challenge for Christians in social work. *Social Work & Christianity*, 25(1), 1-19.
- Slessarev, H. (2000). Saul Alinsky goes to church. *Sojourners*, 29(2), 22-26.
- Social Welfare Action Alliance, Columbus Circle Station, P.O. Box 20563, New York, NY 10023, from <http://www.swaac-tion.org>

Observations from the Field of Faith-Based Organizing: Revitalizing Social Work Skills in Policy and Social Action

Specht, H. & Courtney, M. (1994). *Unfaithful angels: How social work has abandoned its mission*. New York, NY: The Free Press.

Staral, J. (1998). Community practice: Lessons for social work from a racially mixed central city church, in Beryl Hugen (Ed.) *Christianity and Social Work*. Botsford, CT: North American Association of Christians in Social Work, 1998, 41-54.

Staral, J. (2000). Building on mutual goals: The intersection of community practice and church based organizing. *Journal of Community Practice*. 7(3), 85-95.

Sykes, L. (2001, Nov. 25). True believer: Pastor works to bring justice to all. *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, p. 1.